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ABSTRACT

The State University of New York (SUNY) Bridge Program is a federally funded work force preparation program that was initiated in October 1992 to help mothers receiving welfare achieve self-sufficiency by helping them acquire job skills. The program is housed at the Urban League of Northeastern New York and SUNY's 10 educational opportunity centers, which are located across the state. Although a state contract governs the Bridge Program, program specifics are determined by local negotiations between Bridge sites and the local school districts they serve. Since its inception, the Bridge Program has evolved from a program providing a mix of short-term and long-term education and training with job placement as its primary goal to a program providing short-term skills training and efforts to get welfare recipients into employment at the earliest possible time. In its second year, Bridge placed 1,308 welfare recipients into meaningful employment. The third phase of Bridge that is now under development will serve the dual purpose of helping New York State meet the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program enrollment level necessary to avoid federal penalties and piloting a new workfare-centered model of welfare employment preparation. Two tables are appended. (MN)

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THE SUNY BRIDGE PROGRAM: A WORKFORCE PREPARATION SUCCESS STORY

A Presentation at the League for Innovation in the Community College Conference

Town and Country Hotel

San Diego, California

February 8-11, 1995

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The State University of New York (SUNY) Bridge Program: A Workforce Preparation Success Story

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

By the year 2000, the United States workforce will be comprised primarily of people of color and females. As the nation transforms into a service industry-global economy, today's employers will depend on these individuals to possess the necessary skills to replace the growing number of retired and unskilled workers. Thus, the state of New York needs a highly trained diverse workforce to participate in the development of an emerging new world-wide economy.

Among the diverse workforce of tomorrow, a large pool of workers will be females who are presently welfare recipients. President Clinton and governors across the nation are constantly discussing ways in which states can reform the welfare system. New York State is addressing welfare reform by requiring recipients to seek work immediately if job-ready, or acquire marketable job skills through short-term training. In fact, proposed federal welfare reform legislation mandates persons receiving public assistance to participate in a job training program for no more than two years, after which they must accept either unsubsidized or subsidized employment.

In order to assist welfare mothers, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients, the U.S. Congress has passed legislation for states to provide literacy and job training to individuals in need. For instance, the Adult Education Act (AEA) of 1966 legislates services to eliminate adult illiteracy, whereas the 1982 Job Training Partnership

Act (JTPA) and the 1988 Family Support Act's Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program are designed to help welfare recipients receive free job preparation training for gainful employment. As a result of these legislation, the federal and state governments are providing grants to local social service agencies and education institutions to train welfare recipients with work skills.

The State University of New York's Office of Special Programs is in its third year of a renewed seven million dollar grant to finance a job preparation program known as Bridge. The Bridge Program is a federally funded workforce preparation program designed to help welfare mothers acquire a skill in order to become self-sufficient. This program is housed at the Urban League of Northeastern New York, and SUNY's ten Educational Opportunity Centers, which are located across the state of New York, and are supervised by the SUNY System Administration's Office of Special Programs.

For over twenty-five years, a large number New York's urban youths and welfare recipients have acquired academic and job preparation skills by taking advantaged of services offered by SUNY's Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs). However, it takes the cooperation of local state departments of social services and adult education program providers to offer academic and occupational skill training to welfare recipients to make them employable. Therefore, a panel of adult education program administrators/officers will present dialogue on current success of the Bridge Program in New York State. The panel of State University of New York System's Office of Special Programs administrators will involve conference participates in their dialogue. The panel presentation will proceed with

the following outline:

I. *Background on SUNY's Office of Special Programs and Educational Opportunity Center- Bridge Program Grant*

II. *Overview on Bridge Program Planning and Organizational Structure*

III. *Workplace Preparation Training Curriculum*

IV. *Program Job Placement Rates*

V. *Experiences and Observations Learned From Bridge Program*

VI. *Question and Answer Period*

VII. *Summary*

The panel of opportunity program administers/officers will elaborate on the aforementioned outline, and attendees will view overhead transparencies and handouts dealing with the topic during the presentation. Thus, the attendees will receive adequate information for developing a similar job preparation model.

List of Panelists

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THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK BRIDGE PROGRAM

In October 1992, the Bridge Program was initiated as a workforce preparation program to enhance training opportunities and case management services to recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) at the ten Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) located in urban areas throughout New York State. The Educational Opportunity Centers provide academic and vocational training programs to welfare recipients and displaced workers acquiring new skills for gainful employment. Bridge combines EOC resources with matching federal resources under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program. Federal funds are made available to State University of New York (SUNY) under a contract with the New York State Department of Social Services (DSS), which is renewed annually.

SUNY's desire to operate the Bridge Program arose from the SUNY 2000 BLUEPRINT, which envisions the University coordinating more closely with other state agencies to achieve important state missions in the areas of health, public education, the environment, economic development and social services. The State's DSS interest in operating Bridge grew out of the need to utilize state resources beyond its own appropriation to draw the maximum amount of JOBS funds available to the state, and the desire to make more JOBS program resources available to the local social services districts (LSSDs) without the necessity of local matching funds.

Although a state contract governs the Bridge Program in broad outline, the specifics are determined by local negotiations between Bridge sites and the LSSDs they serve. The results of these negotiations are Local Cooperative Agreements (LCAs), which contain a mix of activities and services tailored to local needs. These agreements assign functions of making referrals and providing supportive services (child care, transportation, etc.) to LSSDs, while stipulating that the Bridge offer certain courses of instruction and related activities, and at certain service levels, during the course of the program year. The centerpiece of the LCAs is the job placement target, set for each site based on its funding level.

The Bridge Program has gone through three distinct phases in its two and one-half years of existence. When the Program began, current thinking in the area of welfare employment preparation favored a mix of short-term and longer-term education and training to suit the needs of a varied welfare recipient population. Within this framework, Bridge offered a range of activities that included basic education, job skills training and college preparation, accompanied by case management, job readiness training and job development/ job placement, in short, most of these activities are allowable under the JOBS legislation. The primary goal of the Program was job placement, with college placements constituting an important secondary goal. In the first year of operation, the Bridge Program reached a 57% student completion rate, and built a solid foundation for exceeding its goals in the second year.

As negotiations opened in the summer of 1993 for Bridge II, the State Department of Social Services was implementing its Jobs FiRST initiative. In contrast with earlier thinking, the Jobs FiRST strategy called for only short-term job skills training and efforts to get recipients into employment at the earliest possible time. Bridge demonstrated a high degree of responsiveness in changing state policies by reworking its program offerings to eliminate basic education (except when it could be offered as instruction contextualized with job skills training), as well as elimination of college preparation programs, and an increase in the number of short-term vocational training offered. Although Bridge's access to federal funds had been reduced (due to a statewide over commitment of JOBS funds which necessitated cuts in all JOBS-funded programs), its job placement target was increased nearly 50%, from 850 to 1227. In its second year, Bridge placed 1,308 AFDC recipients in meaningful employment.

Negotiations for Bridge III in the summer and fall of 1994 envisioned continuation of the Jobs FiRST initiative, and the State Department of Social Services requested from Bridge yet a higher ratio of job placements to funds expended. Our current commitment calls for service to nearly 3,000 recipients and nearly 1,400 job placements. As of March, 1995, we have attained nearly half of the enrollment goal and over 21% of the job placement goal. When hiring accelerates in the spring, summer and early fall, we do not anticipate any difficulty in meeting the current job placement target. State DSS also made available to Bridge about $1.1 million in additional JOBS funds to support BEGIN, the JOBS Program in New York City, where two-thirds of AFDC recipients in New York State are found.

The new Bridge Community Service Program, now under development, will serve a dual purpose: to assist New York State in meeting the JOBS enrollment level necessary to avoid federal penalties, and to pilot a new workfare-centered model of welfare employment preparation. Under this model, recipients will be given a community service assignment for three to six months, during which they will develop their work habits and demonstrate their commitment to obtaining gainful employment and leaving welfare. After this, recipients will be enrolled in education and training necessary to complete their preparation for employment. This new model is very much in line with federal and state welfare reform legislation currently under consideration, and should position the Bridge Program to be a part of next year's welfare reform efforts.

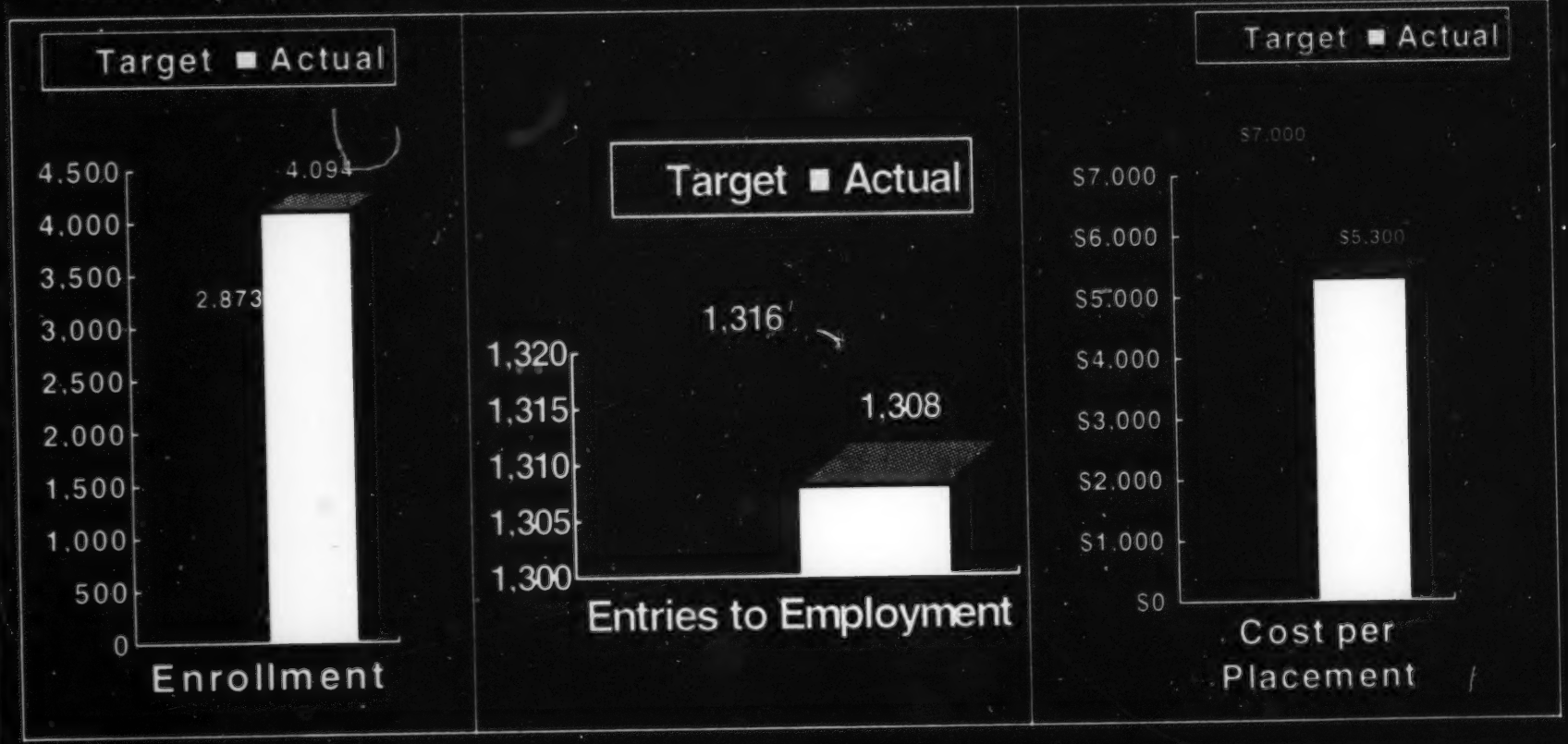
In summary, the Bridge Program has demonstrated the University's commitment to be an active participant in carrying out state policies and achieving important state purposes in the social services area, and will continue to do so in future years.

Office of Special Programs
Bridge II Summary Statistics
January - December 1994

Enrollment 142.50% of Target

Entries to Employment 99.39% of Target

$5,300 cost per placement



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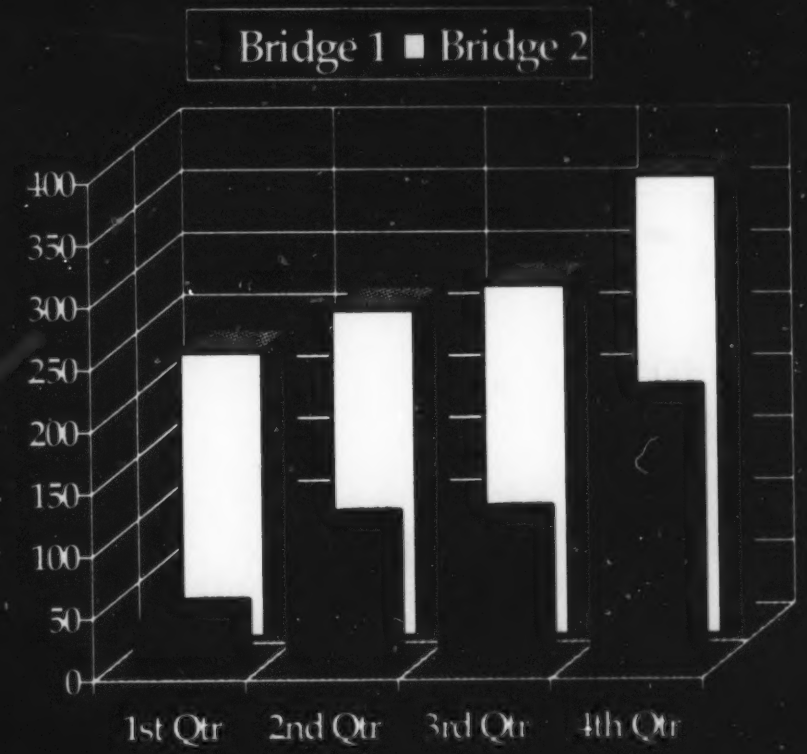
Entries to Employment

State University of New York
Office of Special Programs
Bridge Program
Bridge 1 - October 1992 - December 1993
Bridge 2 - January 1993 - December 1993



Bridge 2 experienced 273% increase in employment over Bridge 1 levels

Bridge 2 year end at 120% of target